

Sūrah Humazah

Central Theme

This *sūrah* is the counterpart of Sūrah ‘Aṣr, the previous *sūrah*. Even a cursory look at both the *sūrahs* reveals a clear similarity in their themes. In the previous *sūrah*, the character of persons who will be salvaged in the Hereafter is depicted. They are those who exhort one other to the right path and remain steadfast on this attitude. In this *sūrah*, people of the opposite character are referred to: They are miserly by nature and greedily accumulate wealth. Instead of urging one another to fulfil the rights of Allah and their own fellow beings, if they see someone doing so, they make his life miserable by hurling taunts and jeers at him. They try their utmost to discourage and demoralize him so much that he may surrender to their reproaches and adopt their evil ways. This attitude conceals their own miserliness and saves them from being conscience-stricken when others call them to the right path.

The Qur’ān, at many instances has made references to this miserly character of people who greedily hoard money. To quote Sūrah Tawbah:

الَّذِينَ يَلْمِزُونَ الْمُطَّوِّعِينَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فِي الصَّدَقَاتِ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَجِدُونَ إِلَّا جُهْدَهُمْ
فَيَسْخَرُونَ مِنْهُمْ سَخِرَ اللَّهُ مِنْهُمْ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ (٧٩:٩)

Those who censure the believers who give freely and who scoff at the poor that give according to their means, Allah will scoff at them, and theirs shall be a torment afflictive.(9:79)

While explaining the above verse, this writer has written:¹

The words مُطَّوِّعٌ and مُتَطَوِّعٌ are the same words. مُطَّوِّعٌ is a person who not only fulfils his obligations but also enjoys doing what is optional and over and above them with great enthusiasm and fervour.

لَمَزٌ means “to censure, to slander, to speak ill of”.

In the above quoted verses, it is stated that the Hypocrites do not

1. Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī, *Tadabbur-i-Qur’ān*, vol. 3, 202-203.

spend in the cause of Allah and also cannot bear to see others doing so. Whenever they see someone spending in such a cause, they start reproaching and ridiculing him. When they see the affluent among the Muslims spending generously and sincerely, they regard it a pretentious display put up to bluff others and to give others a false impression of piety. If they see the poor, who have barely saved something to spend in this cause, they scorn and sneer at them to discourage them.

It is the psychology of misers to try to induce others to miserliness in order to hide their own, just as a person with an ugly nose wishes others to be like him so that no one remains to call him ugly. The hypocrites also would satisfy their emotions of rivalry with Islam by doing the same. They did not want to spend a penny for its cause nor did they want others to do so. They could not bear people spending generously on the poor. So, when they would see an ordinary labourer happily giving whatever dates he had saved, sacrificing the needs of his wife and children and buying the wealth of the two worlds in their place, they writhed and twisted with venom and satisfied their anger by scorning and taunting them.

This character of the misers actually portrays their helplessness. Neither do they have the courage and spirit to outdo others in fulfilling the rights of their fellow beings nor can they stop others who call upon them to do so. The only course left for them to defend themselves is to gibe and mock at those who are actually exposing their weaknesses. Because they were trying to conceal their inner self, the *sūrah* has brought to light every aspect of both their inner and outer selves.

It should be clear that though in this *sūrah* the character of the stingy is actually depicted, yet the character of those having other moral weaknesses is no different. They also try to defend themselves by making fun of those having high moral character. The people of Lot (sws) too had adopted a similar attitude. When they observed that it was becoming difficult for them to counter the reformatory movement launched by the Prophet Lot (sws) and his companions, they, instead of mending their ways, started scoffing and leering at the Prophet Lot (sws) and his companions by saying: إِنَّهُمْ أَنَاسٌ يَتَطَهَّرُونَ (these people pretend to be noble, (27:56)). They even started exhorting their nation to banish “these nobles” from the country, lest they disgrace the whole nation.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 وَيُلْ لِّكُلِّ هُمَزَةٍ لُّمَزَةٍ (١) الَّذِي جَمَعَ مَالًا وَعَدَّدَهُ (٢) يَحْسَبُ أَنَّ مَالَهُ أَخْلَدَهُ (٣) كَلَّا
 لَيُنْبَذَنَّ فِي الْحُطَمَةِ (٤) وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْحُطَمَةُ (٥) نَارُ اللَّهِ الْمَوْقَدَةُ (٦) الَّتِي تَطَّلِعُ عَلَى
 الْأَفْئِدَةِ (٧) إِنَّهَا عَلَيْهِمْ مُّصَدَقَةٌ (٨) فِي عَمَدٍ مُمَدَّدَةٍ (٩)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

Devastation to every person who makes evil gestures at others and to every slanderer who amassed wealth and kept counting it. It is as if his wealth had rendered him immortal. (1-3)

By no means! He shall be flung into that which crushes. And what do you imagine that which crushes is? A fire kindled by Allah; which will rise up to their hearts. They will be enshrouded in it, fastened to columns very high. (4-9)

Explanation of the Sūrah

وَيُلْ لِّكُلِّ هُمَزَةٍ لُّمَزَةٍ²(١)

The word هُمَزٌ means “to make evil gestures at others”, and لُمَزٌ means “to malign and slander someone”. هُمَزَةٌ and لُمَزَةٌ are intensive forms, as is حُطَمَةٌ mentioned later in the sūrah. هُمَزَةٌ means “someone who makes evil gestures at others”, while لُمَزَةٌ means “one who finds faults in others”. Making evil gestures and slandering others are the two aspects of the same character. The first relates to behavioural expressions, and the second one pertains to verbal expressions. Both are employed to degrade and ridicule others. At times, the first can prove the sharper of the two, and perhaps this is the reason for placing هُمَزَةٌ before لُمَزَةٌ.

In every civilised society, هُمَزٌ and لُمَزٌ are always considered to be mean habits. All divine religions forbid them. The Qur’ān also clearly prohibits a person to do so:

وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا بِالْأَلْقَابِ (١١:٤٩)

And do not defame one another nor revile each other by evil names. (49:11).

This “art” was patronized and promoted not only in ancient uncultured

2. Devastation to every person who makes evil gestures at others and to every slanderer.

societies but is also in vogue in the “modern” uncultured societies. Today, humorous columns and cartoons published in newspapers and magazines do the job which was done by the mimics, imitators and jesters of yester years. In Sūrah Qalam, a comprehensive analysis of the leaders of Quraysh as well as their cohorts is made. It shows that they also wanted to thwart the attempts of the Muslims in spreading the Islamic Message by adopting tactics similar to those employed by the professional leaders of today to get the better of their opponents. The Prophet (sws), therefore, was advised to remain aware of this foul play in the following words by the Qur’ān:

وَلَا تُطِيعْ كُلَّ حَلَّافٍ مَّهِينٍ هَمَّازٍ مَّشَاءٍ بَنِيمٍ مَنَاجٍ لِلْخَيْرِ مُعْتَدٍ أَثِيمٍ عُتُلٌّ بَعْدَ
ذَلِكَ زَنِيمٍ أَنْ كَانَ ذَا مَالٍ وَبَنِينَ (٦٨: ١٠-١٤)

Pay no heed to any ignominious oath-monger, who makes evil gestures and who sows seeds of dissension, forbiddener of good, transgressor and usurper of rights, cruel and moreover a flatterer -- only because he has been blessed with wealth and children. (68:10-14)

الَّذِي جَمَعَ مَالًا وَعَدَّدَهُ³ (٢)

The verse vividly portrays the life of stingy people. On the one hand, they do all what they can to silence those who call upon them to fulfil the rights of Allah and their own fellow beings, and on the other are busy amassing riches and greedily hoarding them. They remain deeply engrossed in computing and calculating their wealth. Speculating about the prospects of success in business is their only food for thought. Issues like the profit that can be obtained from various business undertakings, the money they can gain from their investments, the measures needed to compensate the loss in a particular economic enterprise and the grand total of their money next year possess their minds. If someone mentions before them that a person has spent his money on orphans and poor, they make fun of him by saying that he is only showing off his wealth and assert: “Look at us, we have spent thousands and no one has the slightest knowledge of it.”

يَحْسَبُ أَنَّ مَالَهُ أَخْلَدَهُ⁴ (٣)

This verse highlights the inner character of the hypocrites. They reckon

3. Who greedily amassed wealth and kept counting it.

4. It is as if his wealth has rendered him immortal.

that their wealth will also buy for them eternal life. Their complete involvement with wealth shows that they seek all pleasures of life in wealth. If they knew that both their wealth and life were ephemeral, they would have expended them in a way which would be profitable for them in the Hereafter. In fact, they would have tried to outdo one another in this dash.

In Sūrah Shu‘arā, this mentality is depicted in the following words:

أَتَبْنُونَ بِكُلِّ رِيعٍ آيَةً تَعْبَثُونَ وَتَتَّخِذُونَ مَصَانِعَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَخْلُدُونَ (١٢٨-١٢٩)

Will you build monuments of no use on every high place and build grand palaces as if you have to live here forever? (26:128-29)

It is a person's attitude towards life and not what he says which gives an indication of his inner self. The life of a person who considers this world as his final destination is totally different from that of a person for whom the next world is the ultimate destination, towards which this life leads. It is not possible that a person who believes in the Hereafter greedily hoard his wealth. Such a person, as the Prophet Jesus (sws) said, keeps his account with Allah:

Keep your wealth with Allah, because your heart is wherever your wealth is. (Matt, 6:21-22)

كَلَّا لَيُنْبَذَنَّ فِي الْحُطَمَةِ (٤)⁵

The word كَلَّا (By no means) is meant to negate the false notion of a miser stated in the previous verse: "thinking that his wealth has rendered him immortal". The Qur'ān says that such a person and whatever he has gathered will be hurled into the raging fire of Hell which shall crush them to pieces.

The word حُطَمَةٌ is from the root HTM which means "to crush to pieces". Like لُمَزَةٌ and هُمَزَةٌ, it is also an intensive form.

and are intensive forms, as is

وَمَا أَذْرَاكَ مَا الْحُطَمَةُ (٥)⁶

The question in this verse is meant to express the dreadfulness of Hell; a fire kindled by the Almighty should not be considered something ordinary. حُطَمَةٌ (that which crushes to pieces) seems a very apt word to depict the

5. By no means! He shall be flung into that which crushes.

6. And what do you imagine that which crushes to pieces is?

total annihilation of wealth amassed in the form of bricks of gold and silver, jewellery, and valuable utensils. This is precisely how the rich of that period used to accumulate their wealth. All such people will see this fate of their wealth, which they reckoned would render them immortal.

نَارُ اللَّهِ الْمُوقَدَةُ (٦) الَّتِي تَطَّلِعُ عَلَى الْأَفْئِدَةِ (٧)⁷

This verse explains the word حُطْمَةٌ stated in the previous one. The characteristic of this fire is that it will first of all seek those hearts that had remained so possessed by the love of wealth that the remembrance of Allah and the Final Day could find no space in them. We all know of certain devices which have been invented to track down specific targets. As soon as they sense their prey, they automatically follow and destroy it. The fire of Allah mentioned in this verse, it seems, will behave similarly and will grip all those hearts which were absorbed with the love of wealth and had remained indifferent to the needs of the poor.

إِنَّهَا عَلَيْهِمْ مُّوَصَّدَةٌ (٨)⁸

The fire shall completely engulf them so that no part of its heat is wasted. The phrase أَوْصَدَ الْبَابَ means “he closed the door”. The fire will close over them as in a brick kiln, destroying them with all its force.

فِي عَمَدٍ مُمَدَّدَةٍ (٩)⁹

This verse depicts the helplessness of these criminals. Even within the fire they will be fastened to high columns with heavy chains. Here only columns are mentioned; Sūrah Hāqqah mentions the chaining of such criminals as well:

خُذُوهُ فَعَلُّوه ثُمَّ الْجُجِيمَ صَلُّوه ثُمَّ فِي سِلْسِلَةٍ ذَرْعُهَا سَبْعُونَ ذِرَاعًا فَاسْلُكُوهُ إِنَّهُ
كَانَ لَا يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ الْعَظِيمِ وَلَا يَحْضُرُ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمِسْكِينِ (٦٩: ٣٠-٣٤)

Seize him, and chain him with an iron collar and cast him into Hell, and then fasten him with a chain seventy cubits long. Indeed, he did not believe in Allah, most High nor did he urge others to feed the poor. (69:30-34)

7. A fire kindled by Allah, which will rise up to their hearts.

8. They shall be enshrouded in it.

9. Fastened to columns very high.